



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE MAKING OF A PLAY IN A PRIMARY GRADE

JENNIE HALL

For several years the historical study in the fourth grade has been Greek life and story, and it has constituted the children's chief interest. The subject was chosen because it gave scope to the free expressiveness of children of this age. It gives fresh material, too, for fancy, which at this time is still active but is beginning to veer off from childish fairies and their like. It feeds the love of beauty which is here coming to birth, but easily dies from lack of careful tending. As the year has been planned, the children hear and read stories of gods and heroes, of nymphs and fanciful beings. They learn how the Greeks worshipped and how they felt toward gods and mountains and sea. They study the life of the people in their homes, their schools, their market-place, their theater. They see Greek vases and casts of Greek statues, and learn the story of their making. They hear how men have uncovered Mycenae and Olympia and many a beautiful statue. As they acquire this knowledge, it must always break bounds and escape into expression. They make vases after the Greek shapes and make such paintings as they think a Greek potter might have liked. They play sculptor and make clay statuettes of their favorite gods and mould figures to illustrate a story. They model Mycenae in sand-pans, ruin it, cover it, and become the excavators who bring its treasures to light again. They write prayers to Dionysus and stories such as they think Orpheus might have sung. They play Greek games and wear Greek costumes, and, what is more to the present point, they are continually acting out stories or incidents that please them. Today, as the heroes of Troy, they have a battle at recess time with wooden swords and barrel covers. In class time, with prayers and dances and an extempore song, they hold a Dionysiac festival. Again, half of them are Athenians, and half of them Spartans in a war of words as to which city is more to be desired. Or they are freemen of Athens, replying spiritedly to the haughty Persian's message. Always what goes in as knowledge must in some way come out as action—painting, drawing, modeling, singing, writing, dramatizing.

Three or four years ago, a class had read a tale of Achilles at Troy and had been strongly interested, some of them violently siding with the hero against the "dog-faced" Agamemnon, others rising to a moral height and nobly blaming him for his selfishness. I thought I saw a chance to drive the moral lesson a little deeper. It would be good, moreover, to purge our souls in Aristotelean fashion by acting out these seething emotions. With a theme that so enlisted feeling, we should surely get vigorous, creative acting. So I suggested making a play. As always, the idea was hailed with joy.

Many times before this I had had experience with plays so sliced

up into acts that drawing the curtain had occupied more time than the dialogue. My excuse to myself had been that that was the way the children had planned it. But I had now begun to think that it was as much my business to supervise children's play-making as their number work, and not to let their untrained habits run riot there any more than among the multiplication tables. So I took a short cut and said: "Now, let's not try to tell the whole story of Achilles in our play, but just his getting angry and getting over it." The suggestion was adopted.

Now attention was focused upon a small area of the story, and some fulness of delineation was possible. There is always, I suppose, a good deal of vagueness and delay in the attack. When your boat lies beached, it takes much shouting and running about to get it launched. "What is going to happen first?" was our starting question. "The quarrel," was the class answer. Now, to be sure, not all the children at once cried one answer in one voice. But the same thing happened that we all have seen occur in a large social group—be it a class of children or a political convention. Some original genius ventured a suggestion. This released the gears in other brains, and more suggestions came. Analytical minds saw difficulties and advantages; opinions were modified, and new suggestions made, until one came that brought a glow and a nod of satisfaction from the majority of the class. That one we adopted, and we then moved forward at my command, for creation must go on with a dash, while the fife and drums are playing. So any piece of composite work, as opposed to individual writing, hints at dead and wounded ideas and lost causes along the line of march. Generally it is worth while to stop and argue out a moot point, but if there is a sign that the interest of the majority is flagging, up standards and forward! and leave the malcontents to clamor. "What shall happen next? and next?" So we worked out our plot-quarrel, meeting to discuss how to get Achilles back, Achilles' refusal to return, death of Patroclus, reconciliation of Achilles and Agamemnon. The children pondered the plot with delight. The climax perfectly satisfied them. Achilles and Agamemnon should shake hands and say, "Let bygones be bygones," and we could forgive Achilles and be happy.

This planning was all done in one day. The next morning, I saw that the children were hungry for acting, and that they must not be put off with further planning of details. I chose the most enthusiastic volunteers for Achilles and Agamemnon and Calchas. They came up to act and flatly failed—could not think of a word to say. Then I asked, "Well, what could they say?" We heard any speech that anybody had to offer, picked another troupe and tried again. Next day there was less eagerness about volunteering to act, and someone explained: "You get up there and you don't know what to say." So we thereupon set about planning the speeches of the scene. A child gave a speech, another improved it, a third offered a substitute, the class expressed its preference, and I wrote it down. Then on to the next! On the fol-

lowing day, the scene as composed was on the board, and the class read it aloud to hear how it sounded. There was sharp criticism, and we made many changes. Often children referred to the story in the books and found speeches there and read them aloud. Once or twice, discouragement or weariness threatened when we lingered too long over a point, and I had to say: "Let's change that later and go on to the next speech." Or perhaps I could give a satisfactory sentence myself and end the trouble—anything to make the period close with an agreeable feeling of having done something good and of having got on a long way. When the play was finished, we acted it to our own great joy and to the more tempered pleasure of the School audience.

Three years later I was casting about for some means of reviewing and clinching the story of Achilles for another class, and I put into their hands copies of the old play. "Oh, can't we act it?" was the cry. We did so then and there, and the children wanted to play it before the whole School at morning-exercise time. But I remarked that every class ought to do a little better than its predecessors. Could they improve this play? There were a few children in the group with unusual literary appreciation. Moreover, we had read and studied some of Lang's beautiful translations of the Homeric Hymns, and they had quickened the "love of lovely words." Now one of these appreciative people said concerning the old play: "The words aren't very pretty. They sound too common." Several people agreed. Then we studied the play, speech by speech, and these gifted ones here and there embellished the original. Once I read the words that Homer puts into the mouths of the heroes. It was hard reading for children, but many of them greeted it with wondering joy. "Let's have it just like that," some said. But the philistines objected; "It's too long. Nobody could learn that." Others, whose ears were open, said: "It doesn't sound like the rest. If we have that speech, we'll have to change the whole play." On some days the literary coterie won the point, on other days the utilitarians; often we compromised, and sometimes I put in a tiding-over sentence, so that in the finished play there is a good deal of fluctuation in the style. There was often a call for the *Iliad*, when invention failed. Its use reacted upon the children's own vocabulary. "I will not slay you," someone suggested for a certain speech and explained that he used "slay" because "kill sounded ugly." Another much-discussed sentence was: "These golden cups are beautiful; they shine like the stars." Somebody had said, "They glitter like the sun," but one boy was eloquent in opposition. "Glitter sounds cheap," he said. "It sounds like a Christmas-tree ornament; and the sun is awful bright and it hurts your eyes; it would be better to say, 'Shine like the stars.'"

After they had worked with the play for a little, the class thought that it did not feel ended with the reconciliation of Achilles and Agamemnon. "He" (that is, Achilles) "hasn't *done* anything," one little girl said. "We want people to like him. I think he was awfully

generous when he was nice to Priam. I think we ought to have that part." But by this time the class was a bit exhausted by its creative labors. So I appointed a committee of five from among the unwearied literary ones (and these were, of course, the most fluent readers). I put the *Iliad* into their hands, with some places marked where I thought they might get help, and let them work together for three or four periods in a snug, retired corner of the hall. They wrote the last act much as it appears below, though, in the hurry of preparing it for the printer, I tinkered it a little in the interest of continuity. My purpose in so doing was not to embellish the play for publication but to forestall disappointment among the children when they should subject their composition to the severe test of dramatic study and presentation. But in one instance I overstepped the bounds. The *Iliad* has Priam speak of the "grievous pathway of old age," and the committee had so transcribed it. I, however, thought this too bitter a touch for younglings and eliminated the adjective. Our Priam was one of the committee that had written the act, and after she had received her printed copy she came to me privately and said: "Oh, why did you leave out 'grievous'? I like it so much! It sounds so pretty! Can't we have it in?" Of course it was restored. Let this one example serve as witness of the fact that to the children almost every word of the play was vitally significant.

The dialogue changed somewhat during rehearsals. In two or three places an actor felt awkward and said: "I ought to have something to say." An instance is where the visitors entered Achilles' hut and shook hands in silence. Discomfort and awkwardness were patent. But when each actor had improvised a sentence of greeting, commonplace though it was, the whole feeling of the scene was changed. In other places a speech proved to fall short of the occasion. Perhaps the developing emotion outgrew it and perforce improved it. Our Priam, for example, at first had the light manner befitting an afternoon tea. Yet, one day, after the class had tried by various means to make her feel the sadness of the old king's situation, she leaped suddenly to appreciation of the tragedy. Then, under the stress of her new emotional understanding, she said: "I'd rather say something that isn't printed. I want to say, 'Now, who would have thought that Achilles would do a favor for an old man with gray hair?'" This plasticity is one of the greatest advantages of a home-made play—it is always in the making. The conditions of change and flexibility is the atmosphere which best engenders creative and really interpretative work.

When we acted our play the children were in Greek costume, but they had already worn it every day for three or four months. Indeed, they thought they *were* Greeks. The cast is largely composed of warriors, yet we had only one piece of armor—a great shield to make Agamemnon feel kingly. Every boy, however, by hook or crook, possessed himself of a sword or a spear and felt as fierce as Ares. As

for setting, we had bare walls and empty stage, except when it was necessary for someone to sit down. Then we had backless benches that we had made. At first the children wanted to build the prow of a ship out of cardboard to lend realism to the scene where Achilles is watching the fight. But that could wait, of course, so we went on with our rehearsing on a bare stage. Meantime, true interpretation seemed to gain importance in the children's minds, and accessories lost it; for toward the end no one again suggested the ship's prow, and the bare stage quite satisfied everybody. A judicious lack of attention to minor matters often will put them into their place in this way. And what we want is utter simplicity of staging as of acting. We are striving, not to please the audience by a finished production, but to help our actors to grow in expressiveness, in completeness of dramatic imagery, in power of emotional conception.

THE WRATH OF ACHILLES

ACT I

(Soldiers are gathered about a pile of spoils. Two slaves sit crouched among the treasure.)

Agamemnon. We have fought a brave fight today. I am proud of you, my men. We have captured a city, and have brought home much spoil. What shall be done with it?

First Soldier. Let us divide it among us.

All. Aye! Aye!

Second Soldier. But the bravest deserve the best.

Third Soldier. To our leader, Agamemnon, let us give these golden dishes and the beautiful maiden Chryseis, for a servant.

All. Aye! Good!

Fourth Soldier. Achilles has done many brave deeds today.

All. True! Aye! Achilles!

Third Soldier. He saved our lives!

Fifth Soldier. It was he who broke in the gates!

Sixth Soldier. Many treasures he captured! Let us give him the best!

All. Aye! The best! Achilles.

Seventh Soldier. Let us give him beautiful Briseis to serve him.

All. Aye-aye! Aye!

Seventh Soldier. And now for our share!

(Soldiers divide the spoils, talking as they do so.)

First Soldier. I got this sword from the king's palace.

Second Soldier. Ah! But these golden cups are beautiful! They shine like the stars.

Third Soldier. This goblet looks as though it had come from the house of Apollo.

Fourth Soldier. And this plate has the carving of Athene on it.

Fifth Soldier. Here is the tripod that held the holy fire.

Sixth Soldier. We have many spoils, but we have not yet rescued Helen.

Seventh Soldier. Ah! If we could only get Helen back and end this long war!

First Soldier. But tomorrow we must fight again!

(Chryses enters.)

Chryses. Noble Agamemnon and brave Greeks, may the gods be kind to you! May you get back Helen! May you go home happy! But give me back my daughter, Chryseis. Take this gold and give me back Chryseis.

Second Soldier. Give him back his daughter.

Fourth Soldier. He is a good old man.

Fifth Soldier. Besides, he is Apollo's priest.

Sixth Soldier. Let him have the girl.

All. Give back Chryseis.

Agamemnon. Be off with you, old man! Come no more among my hollow ships. I will carry your daughter far away from her native land, to Argos, where she shall serve me as my slave. Many a weary hour shall she sit at the loom and weave the tiresome time away. And she shall spread my bed and grind at the mill. So be off with you before I grow more angry.

Achilles. Ill will come of this, Agamemnon.

(Chryses turns to go. He lifts his hands and prays.)

Chryses. O Apollo, lord of the silver bow, giver of light, god that rulest over Chryse, hear me! If ever by word or deed I have gladdened thy heart, or if ever I have built a temple in honor of thy name, fulfill my wish! Let thy death-bringing arrows fly fast against these scornful Greeks. Let them suffer as I suffer for my daughter.

ACT II

(The same place as in Act I. The warriors come walking sadly in.)

Agamemnon. For nine days Apollo's arrows have been flying thick upon us. Many men have died. We shall all perish under the plague. Is there no one here who can tell us why it is that Apollo is angry at us?

Calchas. O Agamemnon, I am a prophet of the gods, and I can tell. It is because we have taken Chryseis away against her father's will, and the priest of Apollo has prayed to the god for revenge upon us, and Apollo has granted his prayer. Therefore, the plague has come upon us. If you will give up your slave, Agamemnon, Apollo will shut his quiver and return to Olympus, and we shall escape from his wrath.

Agamemnon. Speaker of evil! Never yet have you told me a thing that was pleasant. And now you lay commands upon me! I must give up my prize for the sake of an old man! But I will keep her!

Calchas. Then beware the wrath of the god! You and your army will die beneath his death-dealing arrows.

Agamemnon. She was my prize. *(Soldiers mutter.)* Yet I will give her back, if that is better. I cannot see my people perish. But shall I go without any prize? Make me ready some other gift.

Achilles. How shall we give you a prize now? They have all been given out to the men. Shall we go begging them back? Wait until we capture another town, and we will give you three times your share.

Agamemnon. I will not wait so long for my prize. Yours I will have. Beware, Achilles, I will come to your hut and take Briseis and keep her!

Achilles. Dog-face and heart-of-a-deer! *(Draws sword. Soldiers pre-*

vent his striking Agamemnon. He grows more calm and thrusts back his sword.) I will not slay you, but I will speak my word unto you. Fight your own battles if you can. I have fought them for you long enough. Capture your own cities and win your own prizes. I will not belong to an army led by a coward. I will go back to my ships and watch your brave deeds. And hereafter deep longing for Achilles will come upon the Greeks. And you will not be able to save them when multitudes fall dying before man-slaying Hector. Then you will tear your heart because you did dishonor to Achilles. (He walks out, followed by Patroclus and a few others.)

ACT III

(In Achilles' hut. Achilles is playing his lyre. Patroclus is listening. They are both unhappy.)

Patroclus. What weary, dragging days! To hear the good din of battle and be held back from the fray like a dog in leash! O Achilles, let us go and help our comrades!

Achilles (singing).

Oh! I'm thinking of Hellas, of far-away Hellas,
Where the green hills are lying,
Where the sunlight is dying,
On the far-stretching fields of my Hellas.

Oh! I'm thinking of Hellas, of far-away Hellas,
Where the waters are flowing,
Where the cattle are lowing
On the wide, sunlit fields of my Hellas,

My far-away Hellas.¹

(He looks out through the door.) There are some of my old friends, the Greeks. I see my old teacher, Phoenix. Odysseus and Ajax are with him, and there are two heralds. They must have some message for me. What can it be? (*Ajax, Odysseus and Phoenix enter.*) Welcome to my hut, my friends. It is long since I have seen you.

Ajax. It is pleasant to see your brave face again.

Phoenix. Ah, how good it is to be under your roof once more, Achilles!

Achilles. Patroclus, mix a sweet drink and spread rugs on the chairs. Make ready a feast. The dearest of men are these that are under my roof. Oh, I am glad to see you again, my friends. What is the news of the camp?

Ajax. It is in a sad plight. Many of our best warriors have been killed.

Odysseus. Hector is raging like a lion. He says he will break into our camp and burn our huts and our ships.

Ajax. The Trojan army is camped under our walls.

Achilles. That is sad news.

Phoenix. The Trojans have driven us inside our walls and have camped before our gates.

(*Slaves bring in tables of food. Men feast and talk.*)

Achilles. I see you are wearing a new sword belt, Ajax.

¹ See *Year Book*, I, p. 91.

Ajax. Yes. The armies were resting the other day. Hector came out and called for a Greek to fight a duel with him. So we drew lots, and I was chosen. After a long fight the heralds came between and stopped us because it was growing dark. Then Hector said: "Ajax you are the best of the Greeks, now that Achilles is gone. Will you wear my sword belt in memory of our duel?" So he gave me his belt, and I gave him mine. I am proud to carry such a brave warrior's sword.

Achilles. Tell me more of that duel.

Ajax. We fought hard and long. I gave Hector a wound, and his spear went to the last layer of my shield, but there it stopped and broke. When our spears were gone, we fought with great stones. I threw a heavy rock at Hector and struck him to the ground. Then the heralds stopped us.

Achilles. That was a brave fight! I wish I might have lent a hand!

Phoenix. We have only a little food in the Greek camp now. The Trojans have kept us so busy fighting that we have had no time to go foraging.

Odysseus. We have feasted here to our heart's desire. But our thoughts are not now upon delicious food. Fear has come upon us in the Greek camp. The Trojan fires are burning below our wall, and Hector has passed his word to smite off the beaks of our ships and to burn the hulls. I am sore afraid in my heart that the gods will grant his boast. I fear it is fated for us to perish here in Troy-land, far from Hellas. Up, then, Achilles, if you are minded at last to save the failing sons of the Greeks. If you do not, you will grieve hereafter, and when the ill is done there is no way to find a cure. Remember what your father said on that day when he sent you to Troy: "My son, the gods have given you strength, but do not on that account keep a proud heart in your breast. Gentleness is better." Swallow your anger now at last, and come and help us. Hear what Agamemnon promises you. Seven tripods you shall have and ten talents of gold and twenty steaming caldrons, and twelve stalwart horses that have won prizes in the race, and seven women slaves, and Briseis, also, he will give back. And if we win Troy and return home, you shall have his daughter for wife, and he will make you king of seven cities. But if Agamemnon is hateful to your heart, take pity on your friends. They will honor you like a god.

Achilles. Hateful to me are these gifts, and Agamemnon himself is not worth a straw. Many a day have we warriors captured towns, while he lay safely in his huts, and we have brought home the spoils to him. And why must we make this war? The Trojans have done me no harm. Moreover, slaves are to be had for the capturing, and horses and tripods for the buying, but man's life, when once it is gone, you cannot buy back. My goddess-mother has told me that if I stay here and fight I shall never see again my native city or my old father, but shall die here. Tomorrow I will launch my ships on the salt sea, and if Poseidon grant me good journey, in three days I shall see home and clasp my father's knees. Phoenix, friend of my youth, come with me. Come and see the beautiful hills of Hellas again and the clear-flowing streams. My old father is waiting anxiously for your return and mine.

Phoenix. O Achilles, you make me sad, reminding me of your old father, my king, and of the beautiful hills of Hellas. And I should hate to be buried in this terrible Trojan land. I will go.

Ajax. Odysseus, let us go. We must tell the news to the Greeks, who now sit waiting. Achilles is a stubborn man, and his proud heart cares nothing for his comrades' love, though they worship him above all the other men among the ships. (*Ajax and Odysseus go.*)

ACT IV

(*Achilles and a companion are watching the fight from the Myrmidon camp.*)

Achilles. The Trojans are pushing the Greeks into the water! Fight, fight, all you Greeks!

Soldier. They are burning Agamemnon's ship!

Achilles. Where is Diomedes and his raging spear? I do not hear Agamemnon's hated voice. Only the war-cry of man-slaying Hector bursts around me.

Soldier. Ajax! Throw your spear, Ajax! (*Patroclus enters, running.*)

Patroclus. O Achilles, be no longer wroth with the Greeks. Be merciful unto them. All the bravest warriors lie in the hollow ship, smitten by spear or sword—Odysseus and strong Diomedes and kingly Agamemnon. And here sits Achilles, nursing his wrath!

Achilles. I will not go!

Patroclus. Pitiless that you are! Surely, Peleus is not your father, nor gentle Thetis your mother. Your father is but a sheer cliff, and the gray sea is your mother, so hard is your heart. May such wrath never take hold of me! But at least, send me forth in your place, and let the hosts of the Myrmidons follow in the hope of bringing some help to the Greeks, sore pressed as they are. Let me have your armor to buckle upon my shoulders, so, perhaps, the Trojans will think that Achilles comes, and will fly, and the wearied sons of the Greeks may take breath.

Achilles. So it shall be! Fall on mightily and ward off destruction from the Greeks. Yet go not too far, lest the Trojans surround you. (*He prays.*) O far-seeing Zeus, lord of the thunder-bolt, hear me. Guard Patroclus in battle and grant that he may drive the Trojans far from the hollow ships. O mighty Zeus, strengthen his heart and send him safely back to me, crowned with victory. . . . Now haste, Patroclus, and may the gods help you! (*Patroclus goes.*) He looks like a great warrior. He will surely carry victory to the Greeks. How the Myrmidons crowd about him! They are hungry for battle.

Soldier. He is at the wall. How the Greeks wave their spears in welcome! The Trojans run from your armor, Achilles.

Achilles. And there is the arm of a man within the armor. How he lays on! Not so far, Patroclus! The Trojans will surround you. Hector comes! Beware! Your shield, Patroclus! Where are you? I can no longer see you, Patroclus. Patroclus, Patroclus! (*Messenger enters, running.*)

Messenger. O Achilles, I bring sad news concerning the man you love. Hector has killed Patroclus and is stripping him of his armor.

Achilles. Patroclus, Patroclus! Oh, ye bitter gods! Patroclus, Patroclus! Coward that I am! There he is lying on the cold ground, and I stand here. Patroclus, Patroclus! (*He runs out.*)

Soldier. Now, woe unto Hector, the slayer of the well-beloved Patroclus!

ACT V

(Achilles enters from battle. Two soldiers follow him.)

Achilles. Ah! I have had my revenge on Hector for killing Patroclus and many other brave Greeks. He shall no longer rage in battle. He shall burn no more hollow ships. He shall never have a great mound built over him, but dogs shall gnaw his bones.

First Soldier (to Second Soldier.) How fiercely burns Achilles' anger!

Second Soldier. I fear he will do shame to Hector's body.

First Soldier. He will never rest until he brings Priam low.

Second Soldier. But now we may win the battle, since Hector is dead.

(Priam enters and falls at Achilles' feet.)

Achilles. Who is this? Is it Priam, King of Troy?

Priam. So they called me once.

Achilles. How did you dare, old man, to come alone to the ships of the Greeks, and to meet the eyes of the man who has slain so many of your sons?

Priam. For Hector's sake I came.

Achilles. Speak not of Hector!

Priam. Think of your father, O Achilles. He is of the same years with me, on the pathway of old age. Yet while he hears of you as yet alive he rejoices in his heart, and he hopes day after day to see his dear son returning from Troy-land. But my Hector I shall never see again striding through the gates of Troy. Be pitiful on me, for I am longing for my dear son. Give him back to me!

Achilles. Nay, your Hector is dead, killed by my arm for the slaying of Patroclus.

Priam. Surely revenge will not follow into the land of the dead! I would only have his body, that we who loved him may weep over it. He was my well-beloved son. Think of your father's tears.

Achilles. Nay, sit here, and we will let our sorrows lie quiet in our hearts, for I am minded to give Hector back to you.

Priam. Now may the gods bless the mighty Achilles, who hardened not his heart against an old man's sorrow!

Achilles. And you would, perhaps, honor him with funeral games, and would cut down trees of the forest for his pyre, and would pile a great mound above him. For nine days I will hold back the army of the Greeks, that you may have your fill of mourning.

Priam. Now who would have thought that Achilles would do a favor to an old man with white hair? What lying man has called Achilles proud, and hard of heart, and unforgiving? Lo, he has poured out pity upon a sore heart.